**Chapter 14: Leaving Your Dog Alone**

There will be occasions when you need to leave your guide dog behind for one reason or another, and it’s important that they are comfortable being separated from you. In order to facilitate this, it’s good to practice leaving them alone periodically. We will begin doing this during class, typically after the first few days with your dog. Instructors will let you know when to implement the practice discussed in this chapter.

The first exercise to do with your dog is to put them in the crate and leave the room for a short period of time (15-20 min). Up until now, the dog has been with you all the time, but it is now comfortable enough with you that it can begin having some time alone. Although it has only been a few days, you may feel quite attached to your dog. However, there is no need to make a big scene out of leaving - you do not even need to say anything to the dog. Be matter-of-fact about it and the dog will not see any need for concern. Once you have placed your dog in the crate, exit the room and wait outside your door for a minute or two, so you can hear if they begin to whine or bark. If they do, open the door but do not approach the crate. Tell your dog "Quiet" in a low, firm tone, then close the door again. As long as you don’t hear any barking or whining for a minute or so, you can move about the building, perhaps get a cup of coffee or start a load of laundry. Stay in the area so that you will hear if your dog does begin to vocalize. When you return to your room, there is no need to make a fuss over the dog. In fact, it can be beneficial to wait a few minutes before taking your dog out of the crate. They may be very excited even though you have been gone only a few minutes. It’s best to wait until they are settled, then get them out of the crate calmly so as not to reinforce excitable behavior.

Once everyone has had a chance to practice a short duration, you will be asked to leave your dog back for some meals. Instructors will typically set up a rotation and will let you know which meals to bring your dog and which to leave them back. The working guide dog should be left alone from time to time so that they do not become reliant on constant human companionship to maintain emotional stability. If any behavioral issues develop once you start practicing leaving your dog alone, such as barking, whining or destruction of the dog bed, seek instructor assistance immediately.

When you do need to confine your dog away from you, either in the crate or on a tie down, take a second to make sure all loose items are out of the dog’s reach. This includes leather articles such as your leash, harness and shoes; all favorite things for a young active dog to chew on. Chewing can occur out of boredom or anxiety and often a dog will attempt to chew on items when you are out of the room. Leave a Nylabone or other approved toy with them to encourage appropriate chewing.

NOTE: If you are training with a new dog at home, you can begin practicing this exercise by leaving your alone in a crate or on tie-down while you are in another area of the house so you can listen for any vocalizing or unwanted behavior. Work up to short errands outside the house. Discuss with your instructor if you feel that your dog is uncomfortable when left alone.

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